**Post:**

**What is the relevance of the Open Source movement in K-12?**Open Source software is a growing trend, and education should take advantage whenever possible. Bob Tinker of the Concord Consortium says:“Educators and programmers worldwide could create a shared collection of educational applications based on cutting-edge open-source educational software that could help realize the potential of technology to transform education” (Solomon, G. & Schrum, L, 2007). This is a great idea and a worthy goal for education, but open source, although free, still has its drawbacks. Many open source programs are very good, but in general not considered as good as proprietary softwares. Lack of quality technical support for open source is another downside to open source. The big positive is cost and the ability to customize the software for individual use.

In many cases open source is not a turn-key operation. Many times some expert technical assistance is required, either in the form of a programmer or help from the creator of the software at a cost. When a school is deciding on a software application, open source should definitely be considered, but it should be thoroughly tested and evaluated against other software options before implementation. Julia Hengstler states:“Keep in mind that freely sourced technologies are rapidly—and I mean rapidly evolving. Be sure to periodically revisit open source and free software as alternatives for your software/application needs and consider making freely sourced options a standard element of periodic software reviews" (Hengstler, 2007).

Solomon, G. & Schrum, L. (2007). Web 2.0: New tools, new schools. Washington, DC: International Society for Technology in Education.

Hengstler, J. (2007). Exploring Open Source for Educators: We're Not in Kansas Anymore--Entering Os. In C. Montgomerie & J. Seale (Eds.), Proceedings of World Conference on Educational Multimedia, Hypermedia and Telecommunications 2007(pp. 4286-4291). Chesapeake, VA: AACE. Retrieved from <http://www.editlib.org/p/25996>.

**Responses:**

Jack, your posting opened my eyes to some of the drawbacks to open source programs such as a lack of technical support. While many school districts are jumping on the open source bandwagon, they should be careful in choosing the best quality and most relevant sources. After considering your points, it seems important to remember to compare the open source software to the proprietary software, as well as to research how much technical assistance would be needed when using an open source program. The benefits of using open source software in education seem to outweigh the drawbacks, but as with most things in life, it is important to research, compare, test, and experiment with the open source programs before making major district decisions as to its usage. According to authors Solomon and Schrum in their book *Web. 2.0, new tools, new schools,* "While they are technically free, the overall costs of implementing and supporting open source programs are not always less than with other choices." (p. 134).  
  
Solomon, G. & Schrum, L. (2007). *Web 2.0 new tools, new schools.* Washington, D.C.:International Society for Technology in Education.

I agree with Allison, your post is eye-opening. We think of the benefits and forget about the drawbacks. Some programs may also come from less than scrupulous sources.

It is interesting to think about open source applications and their impact on school districts. In many cases, there is a perspective that open source and free should mean that the product is not of high quality. I have learned from sister districts around us where Microsoft products are used for the administrative departments, and OpenOffice was used for all teachers and campuses that teachers believed they were short-changed. The appearance was not one of cost-savings by using an open source product, but one of inequality for resources. Microsoft's marketing and brand awareness has an impact on the perception of whether a product is worthy and of good quality in the eyes of many in our organization. The issue for students sometimes comes in that is using OpenOffice a good training ground for them. What are they likely to use in the workforce when they leave us? I am under the belief that you take what you learn and apply to the next latest and greatest applications. If the exposure to learning technology productivity applications helps students to find a comfort with any and all applcations, they should apply what they know of one product to using another product. It's that transfer of knowledge we hope for learners of all ages. But, it is interesting that some would believe that open source and free is questionable.  
  
MJ McDaniel

Definitely great insight, Jack! However, I have to point out that Free Open Source Software (FOSS), or Free/Libre Open Source Software (F/LOSS) has one big advantage over licensed software: crowdsourcing. Licensed software often comes with technical support (although as trends would have it, free technical support is dwindling, if not disappearing altogether), but FOSS advocates are abound in forums and social networks, and developers often form support groups to assist the hapless n00b. I have been a grateful beneficiary of this one too many a time, and because of this I just felt the need to speak out in their defense. Wired magazine's editor Chris Anderson even wrote a book on the freeware movement entitled, "Free: The Future of a Radical Price." On a related note, here's a wonderful site (read: safe) for FOSS applications: <http://freeopensourcesoftware.org/index.php?title=Applications>

Your comment was information that we all needed to know. In the last year more and more schools are considering Open Source and they need to be careful about the Open Source software they select. Schools are always looking for a silver bullet to help in education, Some times the change is not good for the district. It is very important that extensive research be done before deciding on an Open Source software.